Responding to Existing and Emerging Demands for University Education:

A Policy Framework

For Discussion

Alberta
ADVANCED EDUCATION

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PREFACE

What framework should Alberta use in building for the future of university level education?

Advanced Education has prepared this discussion paper in order to facilitate consideration of this question. It is being distributed to institutions and agencies within post-secondary education, including the public institutions, four private colleges, the Confederation of Alberta Faculties Associations, the Alberta College-Institute Faculties Association, the Council of Alberta University Students, and the Alberta College and Technical Institute Student Executives Council, among others. All are being asked to provide their organization's/institution's response to the opening question above. For post-secondary institutions, in particular, what role(s) do you see for your institution and other institutions in the system? Responses are to be submitted by April 1, 1990, and the department would welcome the opportunity to discuss the questions that have been posed in this paper, should this appear to be useful, before a formal response is made.

Based on this consultation and other activities, the Minister of Advanced Education will prepare a policy proposal for discussion with his colleagues.

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INTRODUCTION

The intent of this paper is to stimulate discussion on the issue of access to university education in Alberta and, more specifically, to solicit responses to the question: "What kind of framework should Alberta use in building for the future of university level education?"

The paper examines the issue of accessibility as it pertains to university-level education and how accessibility is addressed in the current environment. The paper also explores several alternative scenarios that may address future needs.

The paper consists of five parts: The Existing Framework for University-level Education in Alberta, Recent Initiatives, Strategic Factors and Issues, Principles, and Scenarios.

The **Framework** section describes the existing system of university-level education.

The **Recent Initiatives** section discusses recent institutional activities that are related to the provision of university-level education.

Strategic Factors discusses the various factors, issues and trends that may influence how the system proceeds to address university-level accessibility.

The **Principles** section provides a set of general criteria to guide future developments.

The **Scenarios** provide a discussion of five possible frameworks for future development. The ultimate response could be some combination of these and other ideas.

II. THE EXISTING FRAMEWORK FOR UNIVERSITY-LEVEL EDUCATION IN ALBERTA

Alberta's participation in university-level education, including full and part-time students, is high relative to other jurisdictions in North America. In 1988-89 approximately 45,000 full-time and 8,800 part-time students were enrolled at residential universities in programs leading to a degree.

Eighteen Alberta-based public and private institutions offer programs leading directly, or through transfer arrangements, to an academic undergraduate degree: 4 universities,

7 public colleges, and 7 private colleges.[1] Seven institutions currently have the authority to confer degrees in programs other than divinity: University of Alberta, The University of Calgary, The University of Lethbridge, Athabasca University, Camrose Lutheran University College, Concordia College, and The King's College. The last three are private colleges.

· While public planning documents from the University of Alberta proposed, among other things, to limit enrolment to 25,000 F.T.E.s (Full-time Equivalent), 5,000 of whom would be graduate students, this plan is now under review within the university. Further, the university proposes to enhance its strong research role. Recent communications from the university have indicated that it would be prepared to accommodate additional students if the resources were made available. Fall 1989 full-time enrolment estimates are 25,000 full-time and 4,500 part-time (December).

· As with the University of Alberta, The University of Calgary has developed a strong reputation in research and wishes to enhance this role. In 1988, the university implemented an enrolment control policy, holding enrolments in the 20,000 F.T.E. range. However the university has suggested that it would be prepared to accommodate more if facilities and operating funds were forthcoming from the Province. Fall 1989 full-time enrolment estimates are 17,300 full-time and 4,500 part-time (December).

· For The University of Lethbridge, fall 1989 full-time enrolment estimates are 3,200 full-time and 500 part-time (December).

· Athabasca University has evolved to being an open university that uses a variety of distance education formats to deliver courses and programs to students at their homes or places of work. 1989-90 estimates of credit course registrations are 16,700 (December).

· The three accredited private colleges have developed university-level programs over many years and have, with the exception of Camrose Lutheran University College, affiliation agreements with the University of Alberta. Four other private colleges currently have affiliation agreements with the University of Alberta.

· Alberta has a recognized transfer system between the university and non-university sectors, facilitated by the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer. Seven public colleges have university transfer programs of one or two years university-equivalency. Almost 4000 full-time students were enrolled in these programs in 1989.[2]

- With the inclusion of entities such as the five community consortia and the Sunrise Project which facilitate the provision of university-level education to smaller communities, it is evident that university education in Alberta is extensive and comprehensive, in terms of both numbers and types of programs offered and where the programs are offered. Albertans have access to at least two years of undergraduate liberal arts and science programming in every region of the province, whether at a university or a regional college.

- The annual provincial expenditure, both operating and capital funding, on the post-secondary system approximates $1 billion in support of the provision of a comprehensive array of programs. For some disciplines not provided, arrangements exist with other provinces to ensure Albertans have access to them.

- The Province has provided extensive support for the construction of new buildings, renovation of existing facilities and the purchase of equipment, so that the total capital infrastructure in the system is now valued at over $4 billion.

III. RECENT INITIATIVES

- The Guidelines for System Development were recently developed in response to a number of imperatives, including the need for: fiscal responsibility in a period of restraint, increased cooperation for program delivery, and longer-term coordinated planning. The principles of accessibility, autonomy and accountability, described in the Guidelines, provide the basis for a framework which can be used to facilitate change.

- In recent years funding has been added to institutional operating budgets to expand the number of students in university transfer programs. Over the past two years, because of enrolment controls implemented at universities in response to increasing enrolments, university-transfer programs were expanded at Grant MacEwan (by 420 F.T.E.s), Mount Royal College (by 440 F.T.E.s), and Red Deer (by 465 F.T.E.s).

- Moreover, current and planned facilities development at Grande Prairie, Lakeland, and Grant MacEwan has occurred, in part, to accommodate expanded university-level programming. Lakeland College's implementation of its Year 2 of university transfer programming in 1989-90 will yield another 30 - 45 qualified F.T.E. students/year. In 1990-91, Grande Prairie Regional College is planning to initiate an expansion of its university transfer program by about 400 F.T.E. overall; this will eventually yield an estimated 200 F.T.E. or more students qualified for further university level studies.

In 1988-89, The University of Lethbridge received a base adjustment to expand programs and to ultimately increase F.T.E. enrolments by 550.

The Province also recently provided substantial support to expand the undergraduate business programs at its three campus-based universities.

In recent years, several cooperative arrangements between universities and colleges have been initiated or are under negotiation. A capstone program in which students can complete an Athabasca University degree at Keyano College was implemented in 1988. Red Deer College and the University of Alberta have made arrangements which will see the university providing training toward its B.Sc. in Nursing in Red Deer. The University of Lethbridge is considering with Medicine Hat College the possibility of brokering the university's programs.

IV. STRATEGIC FACTORS AND ISSUES

Seven key factors can be expected to influence the selection of an appropriate strategy for the future provision of university-level education in Alberta.

Factor 1: Accessibility

The government's principle of accessibility is that "All Albertans should have the opportunity to participate in post-secondary education, should their interests and ability lead them to do so." Accessibility, in general terms, has been implicit in Advanced Education's funding and program policies.

The issue is how this principle can be maintained during a period of fiscal restraint.

Factor 2: Credibility of Programs

Credible university programs tend to have the following characteristics: they have been in place for several years and had some graduating classes, the graduates have met with some post-graduation success, the programs have formal recognition from the Minister of Advanced Education, they are recognized by other institutions, and, in most cases, they are offered through traditional means.

Credibility is established, to an extent, through agencies such as the Private Colleges Accreditation Board and the Universities Co-ordinating Council (UCC) and professional bodies such as the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of

Alberta, as well as by the department through the Program Planning and Coordination Procedures provided in the Guidelines for System Development.

Factor 3: Community Pressures

These pressures take many forms, from local MLA's and community leaders supporting the development of their local institutions to Alberta universities that are opposed to degree-granting privileges being bestowed on non-resident institutions in Alberta.

Administration, faculty, students and parents exert pressures that focus on prestige, economic development, family cohesion, and costs to students, in addition to general concerns expressed about access.

Factor 4: Mandate Clarification

As is noted in the Alberta Advanced Education paper **Goals and Priorities: Post-Secondary Education, 1989 to the Year 2000**, the clarification of mandates of all Alberta public institutions is a priority for the system.

Questions such as "What degree programs need to be provided throughout the province?" and "Which programs should be offered in specific areas?" need resolution. The answers to these questions would involve consideration of, for example, degree granting for public colleges, which would represent a significant departure from their current mandate.

The provision of off-campus programs by the universities may need to be an explicit component of their mandates.

Factor 5: Role of Other Institutions

The Province has recognized the role of several private colleges through the role of the Private Colleges Accreditation Board. Should the Province encourage these colleges to take in more students? Would this entail changes to the relationship between the Province and these private colleges?

Community colleges in Alberta provide career programs in a variety of areas, and seven colleges also offer university-level education. Should the public colleges play a greater role in support of the universities? How would other programs and services offered by the colleges be affected by the decision?

Technical institutes currently do not offer university transfer programs, although some

formal agreements have been reached for selected courses to be recognized by the universities. Should the technical institutes be considered as a way of relieving the pressure at the universities, especially in the technical areas?

Several out-of-province institutions currently offer degree programs in Alberta, primarily at the professional and graduate levels, to working Albertans. Can or should these institutions be expected to play a greater role in Alberta?

In the past, the universities have shown mixed inclinations toward addressing in a large way the needs of students off-campus outside of their particular urban settings. Not only do costs enter the picture but so do their residency requirements, which may require students to relocate to complete their degrees. Residency requirements are acting in many instances to restrict access; will universities initiate actions to remove these barriers?

Factor 6: Fiscal Considerations

Budgetary restraints are expected to continue for the foreseeable future. The system will be challenged to find innovative, cost-effective means to maintain quality and access.

The Guidelines for System Development encourage all institutions to develop their plans for the future within the context of the larger system. The success of the Guidelines ultimately lies with the level of commitment of all parties to continuing the development of a system that provides the highest quality of education possible to Albertans who have the qualifications and the motivation to participate, and to do so by allocating existing resources in an optimal manner.

Another fiscal consideration relates to the costs of replacing the aging faculty at the institutions. Forecasts suggest that the number of doctoral graduates being produced will decline in the 1990's just as the demand is expected to increase due to abnormally high faculty retirement rates and the echo boom commences. Do steps need to be taken in order to ensure the continuity of high quality faculties?

Factor 7: Trends

There is a need to recognize major trends in order to both prepare for the future and to ensure the system is responsive to change.

Two recent documents distributed by the Minister are particularly useful in the follow-

ing discussion: **Goals and Priorities-Post-Secondary Education, 1989 to the year 2000; and Trends and Issues in Post-Secondary Education, 1989 to the year 2000.**

The **Trends and Issues** document identifies several major trends that are pertinent: shifts and increases in enrolments, increasing educational standards, regionalization, and increasing complexity of programs and cost of infrastructure.

1. Shifts and Increases in Enrolments

- While the major population pool from which students are drawn will be lower over the next 6-8 years, it is expected that the need for, and interest in, university education will remain high.

- More students will be drawn from non-traditional sources: natives, women, older students, part-time students, and the disabled.

- Notwithstanding a forecast of little or no enrolment growth in the first half of the decade, demand will likely exceed the supply of spaces currently available in some regions and in some popular programs.

- The echo baby boom will tend to push up enrolments beginning in the late 1990's with a peak around 2008, perhaps at over 60,000 full-time students.

- In the face of constrained financial resources, universities have moved to control enrolment through higher admission requirements and/or quotas. For example, The University of Calgary has established an enrolment ceiling of a little over 20,000 F.T.E.'s while the University of Alberta has established a 70% entrance requirement, is considering quotas for its Arts and Science faculties, and has recently approved a quota within its B.Ed. program.

- The issue is how responsiveness can be maintained with the advent of nearly across-the-board quotas in most university-level programs.

2. Increasing Educational Expectations

- There is growing pressure on university education to meet the changing expectations of the student, the marketplace and society. These expectations include: the increased use of high technology at the worksite, the need for graduates who have well-developed critical thinking, communication and problem solving skills, the changing profiles of the

workplace and society, and the need to compete effectively in the international marketplace.

- There is an increasing requirement for special support services and facilities to enable the disadvantaged to participate in the labour force as fully as possible.

- Further, it is anticipated that public institutions will have an increased role in industry-based training and other forms of cost-recovery programs. Many institutions provide courses and programs in this manner and wish to expand this market. As well, several out-of-province institutions have entered Alberta in response to employees who wish to improve their credentials.

3. Regionalization

- There has been marked growth in the provision of educational opportunities throughout the province, primarily at the public colleges, outside the centres where universities are located. Currently there is a shortage of skilled workers and professionals in rural Alberta relative to significant economic development in the outlying regions. It is anticipated that the demand for basic university education, as well as for specialized and professional programs, will continue to grow in non-urban areas. Can these demands be met, given fiscal and other considerations?

- To meet these needs and expectations, some public colleges have expressed an interest in having degree-granting capabilities on-site.

- More cooperative planning between universities and colleges may be needed to address the needs of students in the rural areas.

4. Increasing Complexity of Programs and Cost of Infrastructure

- Considerable investment has been made by the Province toward developing and maintaining Alberta's post- secondary educational infrastructure. There is a scarcity of funds available for new campuses and physical structures. Moreover, there are increasing requirements for highly specialized equipment as well difficulties in maintaining currency due to rapid obsolescence.

- Future challenges include ensuring the present infrastructure is adequately maintained

and sufficiently adaptable to respond to changing technological needs for both students and faculty/researchers.

Summary of Trends

It is expected that, over the mid- to long-term, enrolment pressures will increase due, in part, to the changing nature of participation in university-level education. For example, while it is anticipated that there will be demand from non-urban areas, in absolute terms demand from the larger urban centres is expected to continue to predominate. Among other things, the trade-offs between bringing education to the student versus bringing the student to the education will have to be weighed.

- The student population's profile and expectations are changing, with more older, part-time, and employed students seeking educational opportunities. The system will need to have more flexible access.

- There will be increased demand for institutions to address special needs such as off-campus delivery, training/retraining programs to maintain technological currency of degrees, and the needs of disadvantaged students. Programs will have to adapt to these needs.

- The demand for up-to-date high technology equipment is increasing. The costs associated with maintaining currency are accelerating.

The factors raised above need to be examined in giving consideration to changes in the provision of university education in Alberta, be it to extend degree granting capabilities to the public colleges, to reconfigure the roles and mandates of existing institutions, to create a new institution, to introduce or change the nature of brokerage or consortia arrangements, or to alter or establish policies on cost-recovery tuition fees and out-of-province institutions.

V. PRINCIPLES

The following set of principles is proposed to guide the selection of a framework:

1. The direction(s) will, at least, preserve the level of quality in degree programming available to Alberta students. Enhancements to the level of quality will be encouraged whenever possible.

2. The direction(s) will optimize existing resources and build on current strengths within the system through cooperative planning.

3. The direction(s) will be sufficiently flexible, in order to enhance responsiveness, and will permit the periodic offering of programs to address emerging and changing needs.

4. The direction(s) will preserve the integrity of the two graduate research universities.

5. The direction(s) will preserve the role of community colleges.

These principles describe an ideal situation, and it is unlikely that any scenario will completely satisfy all the principles at the same time.

VI. SCENARIOS

The preceding discussion provides a basis for considering a number of scenarios. These scenarios, while neither mutually exclusive nor comprehensive, can serve as a starting point for building a future framework. The scenarios should be assessed within the context of con tinued fiscal restraint. While data have not yet been developed on the relative costs of the options, such information will have a major bearing on the ultimate decision.

Scenario 1: Build on existing institutional mandates and programming for university-level education at the universities, public colleges and private colleges in order to increase the capabilities of the system. The research function would continue to be concentrated at the universities. Foster innovative inter-institutional bridging arrangements, such as capstone and brokering, and encourage the use of regional campus facilities of the colleges for delivery of university-level programs by the universities. Further, the sharing of facilities among institutions and more efficient use of existing facilities would be encouraged.

PROS

- Administrative capabilities are potentially in place and models for expanding or extending in all regions are readily developed.

- Credibility is easily maintained.

CONS

- Would probably be viewed as a "half solution" by those institutions and communities wanting degree granting mandates and status.

- Universities may not be willing or able to continue to explore these avenues without significant additional infrastructure and fiscal support.

- The degrees obtained at alternate locations may be considered by some to be inferior to those offered on-campus.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Tuition fee policy may need to be amended to provide for cost-recovery on programs delivered off-campus. Alternatively, a program fund may have to be established to support off-campus delivery.

- Athabasca University's mandate as an open university delivering programs through distance education may have to be enhanced/altered under this scenario, with respect to alternative modes of delivery within the system. Other universities would also be encouraged to undertake additional cooperative activities with the colleges.

- The specific program areas or directions chosen would have to be resolved. Would liberal arts and science programs be provided in all regions with specialized programs available only in the major urban centres, or would all regions have a wide range of degree programs available?

- It would be necessary to ensure the transferability of courses. It might be desirable to have a situation whereby students from any part of the province could take courses from a variety of sources and be awarded a provincially recognized baccalaure ate. Several other jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, have created a similar degree.

Scenario 2: Establish a new degree-granting institution.

PROS

- A new institution could permit the creation of an institutional mandate suited to identified needs.

- Accessibility would be enhanced in general by the provision of additional spaces for university degree programs.

CONS

- It would be difficult to set the standards upon which a decision could be made on the location of this institution.

- Regions that do not have comprehensive degree programming because of low population may view this development as unsatisfactory. Accessibility in all regions is not necessarily addressed.

- It may be dificult to create a new institution in a period of fiscal restraint.

- There would be considerable time lag, perhaps decades, until a new institution could establish credibility. Institutions in other Canadian jurisdictions have experienced this problem.

- Short-term enrolment projections across the system do not support establishment of a new institution.

- Alberta already has a large number of institutions, and concomitant investment in infrastructure, relative to other populations of similar size.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Criteria for determining the location of an institution and ascertaining what constitutes sufficient demand would need to be established.

- The program mandate of the institution would have to be established.

- Additional capital construction or leased space would be necessary.

Scenario 3: Encourage out-of-province universities to offer programs in Alberta.

PROS

- There would be an expanded opportunity for access to degree programs in Alberta.

- Programming would be supported only indirectly by government, through student assistance, and capital costs would be nil.

CONS

- Out-of-province universities are not likely to meet the needs identified in all regions because of insufficient demand in some regions and, to date, these institutions have been geared to offering professional and graduate programs only.

- Out-of-province institutions are not presently accountable to the province, and the reliability of their service could be at issue.

- Tuition fees could be significantly higher than those currently levied by Alberta institutions. This would be an issue for undergraduate level programming, particularly if non-residential institutions were relied upon to meet basic needs.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The Minister's authority to establish regulations concerning out-of-province institutions may be at issue.

- The role of private, for-profit institutions in university-level education and the enhancement of access to higher education for all Albertans are fundamental policy issues.

Scenario 4: Approve degree-granting status for some public colleges in Alberta.

PROS

- Public colleges are located in all regions.

- Credibility of the university transfer programs is well established.

CONS

- Articulation with universities could become an issue because of factors such as qualification levels of instructors. The aging professoriate at the universities and

colleges may mean that in a few years they will all be short staffed.

- Credibility of their degrees may be difficult to establish.

- Some of the public colleges can be expected to aspire to undertake research such as that carried out by universities. This would impact the relative cost-effectiveness of this option and impact the research resources available at universities.

- Community colleges have been an important ingredient in Alberta's economic and social development; there is some concern that degree-granting privileges would undermine their basic nature.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Sets a direction for how the degree credential might be viewed by various groups in the future.

- Tuition policy would need to look at bringing degree programs at public colleges under the same conditions as at universities.

- Questions as to the type of degrees and their relationship to university degrees would have to be resolved.

Scenario 5: Support the development and introduction of a two-year associate degree at the public colleges and technical institutes.

PROS

- Would satisfy the needs of those students who want a degree but do not wish to spend four years or more obtaining it.

- To the extent that this credential might satisfy some students' needs for a degree, enrolment pressures on years 3 and 4 could be reduced.

- Can be implemented with little or no additional funds.

CONS

- Credibility of new credential may be difficult to establish in the working world or for more advanced studies.

- Would not address residual demand for year 3 and 4 of university-level education in the non-urban regions.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Would alter perceptions of what constitutes a degree.

- Would introduce another 'tier' of credential into the system although many jurisdictions have associate degrees.

- Could be used as a catalyst to develop a standardized program throughout the system for years one and two of university education.

VII. CONCLUSION

In sum, this paper is intended to encourage discussion about access to university-level education and how to best meet the challenges of the next decade and beyond. It is hoped that by encouraging institutions and others interested in post-secondary education to consider and to comment on the ideas presented in this paper, students, institutions, the public and Advanced Education can work together in establishing a framework for the future.

Footnotes

1. The eighteen institutions are:

Universities: University of Alberta, The University of Calgary, The University of Lethbridge, and Athabasca University.

Public Colleges: Grande Prairie Regional College, Grant MacEwan Community College, Keyano College, Lakeland College, Medicine Hat College, Mount Royal College, and Red Deer College.

Private Colleges: Camrose Lutheran University College, Concordia College, North American Baptist College, St. Stephen's College, St. Joseph's College, The King's College and Canadian Union College.

2. The fall full-time enrolments for university transfer programs at the seven public colleges were:

College	Fall 1987	Fall 1988	Fall 1989 (Prelim)
Grande Prairie	415	411	461
Grant MacEwan	a)	233	415
Keyano	107	151	125
Lakeland	52	46	108
Medicine Hat	515	587	577
Mount Royal	610	965	1159
Red Deer	870	1036	1122
Total	2569	3429	3947 (Prelim., Sept.)

a) Grant MacEwan Community College's university-transfer program commenced in September, 1988.

(Source: Institution - reported).